

My name is Robin Slane. I am a special educator from Waterford, CT. As a special educator for over twenty years, I highly support House Bill 6517.

When I first started in the education field over thirty years ago, I trained as a high school English teacher. My mentor assigned me five classes of students in eleventh and twelfth grades with one remedial reading class. As a student teacher, I was told very little about the remedial class, only that these three students were low, lazy and troubled readers. Upon working with them and the provided Dick and Jane readers, I realized that these students had many interesting personalities, talents and backgrounds. Unfortunately, none of them could read beyond first grade and none of them had specialized, multi-sensory reading instruction when they were younger.

Through this experience, I often wondered about these three students and not the students of the four other classes I taught. One non-reader, Ben is now a 45 year old man who graduated from a New York high school without reading beyond second grade. I am embarrassed to admit that I was a part of his educational failure.

After receiving my M.A. in English, I found that the field of special education called me. I went back to get my M.S. in Special Education to work with reluctant readers in late elementary and early middle school. Graduate school did not prepare me to implement direct, explicit, structured multi-sensory lessons in reading. After two years working in the field of late elementary resource room teaching, I requested training in various research based reading programs. At the time, parent advocates at my school were demanding research based programs in order to treat their students with dyslexia. I was intrigued and wanted to learn as much as I could about possible programs and training to make a difference in the life of a non-reader or low reader.

After many years of training in evidence based programs that target fluency, decoding, and encoding, I've seen at least one hundred students benefit from this intensive form of instruction. My reading instruction is sequential, mastery based, cumulative and diagnostic. Parents can see incremental progress as their children learn to read using tapping procedures, word marking/syllable division strategies and finally confidence that their child can be a successful reader with high accuracy and increased fluency/automaticity.

After using structured literacy for the last fifteen years and seeing the improvement it has on learning disabled students with dyslexia, I must suggest that all special education teachers receive at least some coursework in the field of dyslexia and specialized instruction in reading. Without it, children will receive what one attorney described as reading instruction with “a little special, extra something in the sauce” and not the structured literacy programs that they deserve for success.

Robin Slane- Dyslexia Practitioner